

State to hold community meeting on future of Fort DuPont

Delaware launches master planning effort with local partners and award-winning firm

DOVER (Oct. 22, 2012) – A community meeting to discuss the future of the Historic Fort DuPont Complex will be held in the Delaware City Fire Hall at 7 p.m. on Thursday, November 8. The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) is seeking input into redevelopment options for the 443-acre state property between Delaware City and the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal.

The site, listed as a National Historic District, is home to several state agencies, including DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Health and Social Services' Governor Bacon Health Center, and the Delaware National Guard. While it is recognized for its military history and as a prime bird watching spot, Fort DuPont is Delaware's least visited State Park. The property is considered underutilized, many of the historic buildings on the site are in poor condition, and coastal storms and flood threaten the historic infrastructure.

A team that includes local partners and an international design firm will perform several critical analyses en route to proposing options for the reuse of what was once a bustling military post along the Delaware River. Sasaki Associates Inc., of Watertown, Mass., has extensive experience with similar projects, and TetraTech of Newark will provide environmental and infrastructure engineering, including floodplain mapping and hydrologic analysis. Other simultaneous efforts will include extensive public engagement; a real

estate and economic development analysis and recommendations for future uses; and an in-depth review of the array of historic buildings, their condition and restoration potential.

Sasaki's expansive credentials include the Presidio Trust Management Plan in San Francisco; the Fort Benjamin Harrison (Indiana) Implementation Plan; the Fort Monroe (Virginia) Master Plan and Implementation Strategy; and the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. Sasaki was honored with the American Planning Association's National Planning Excellence Award for a planning firm earlier this year.

At the first community meeting for the Fort DuPont Master Plan, Sasaki Associates will share preliminary observations and analysis of the Historic Fort DuPont Complex. Following Sasaki's presentation, community members will be asked to discuss their goals and aspirations for the property at interactive workgroup tables. The full planning team will be available to address the community's questions.

The current initiative to re-envision Fort DuPont was launched by Governor Jack Markell when he proposed funding the redevelopment master planning effort in his recommended budget for fiscal year 2012. "Fort DuPont's rich history, distinctive architecture, and abundant natural resources serve as a solid foundation for the site's rebirth," Gov. Markell said. "We want to know what Delawareans think about its future and encourage citizen engagement in the master planning process. This is about enhancing the area as a great place for families and strengthening the greater Delaware City community."

"Delaware City is emerging as a marquee destination for boaters, bikers, and birders – all of whom flock to enjoy the pristine natural resources and rich maritime history," said DNREC Secretary Collin O'Mara. "A rejuvenated Fort DuPont will complement efforts underway in Delaware City to spur tourism and economic development, the development of the Chesapeake

and Delaware Canal Trail, and the recently-announced Delaware Bayshore Initiative – and could serve as a model for the East Coast by demonstrating adaptive reuse of historic infrastructure, integrating green building practices, providing recreational opportunities, enhancing wildlife habitat, and implementing best management practices for stormwater.”

Delaware City is a key partner in the project. “The redevelopment of the property at Fort DuPont offers the State and the City a unique opportunity to better preserve the historical significance and heritage of a very important part of our history,” Delaware City Mayor John Buchheit said. “More importantly it will revitalize the Fort by bringing new opportunities for businesses, provide new homes and enhanced recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. I would love to see health care services, higher education opportunities and a walkable community that blends with our existing town. I applaud the Governor for his vision and dedication in making this happen.”

“Preserving our history and heritage has always been a top priority for Delaware, but we also need to figure out the best way to use those resources,” said House Majority Whip Rep. Valerie Longhurst, whose district includes Fort DuPont. “We have an opportunity to carefully plan the future of this state park and steer it to becoming something special. I hope that residents come out and offer input so we can make the best possible decisions.”

Fort DuPont, named after Rear Admiral Samuel Francis DuPont, originated during the Civil War. Along with Fort Delaware and Fort Mott, New Jersey, it successfully defended this strategic point along the Delaware River from naval attack through 1921. Of the three, Fort DuPont was the main defense site during World War I. The fort housed prisoners of war from Germany’s Afrika Corps during World War II, and was decommissioned after the war ended. Governor Bacon Health Center opened on the site

in 1947.

The site contains six Endicott Era (1885-1905) gun batteries, named for President Grover Cleveland's Secretary of War, William C. Endicott. DNREC maintains a boat launch into the Branch Canal adjoining Delaware City, and historic groups have adopted some of the buildings for renovation. Trails within the park are frequented by birdwatchers.

The Delaware City Fire Hall is located at 815 Fifth St. (Route 9).